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## **Shortgrass Country**

**by Monte Noelke**

Applicants for summer work sure haven't shown up around our outfit. Not one mother or dad has called wanting to make a man out of their son. And the two students who had been helping us the past several summers didn't even so much as extend a courtesy call when they came home from school.

One of them I did track down working at the bank in Mertzon as a teller. By the time I located him it was already too late to talk him into taking a ranch job. He'd caught on how it felt to work under an air conditioner, how to tie a necktie and prepare himself to celebrate every holiday from the founding of double-cruste blueberry pies to the anniversary of the opening of the first helpy-selfy laundry in America.

Under the spell of the white marble and inlaid wood , I didn't want to ask him if he missed hearing the tools hitting the back of the old fencing truck, or yearned for the sound of an air hammer drilling through bedrock. I didn't want to embarrass him in front of the other tellers by reminding him that he hadn't always been a bank employee.

Barriers go up real fast between the jugkeepers and their customers. Once they experience that sung feel of a rate book in the breast pocket of their coats, old pals are

never like they were in high school, or working at the wool house, or off on the creek running a trot line.

The more they are taught about compounded advantages and discounted disadvantages and all those marvelous behind-the-scene secrets, the less likely they are to advance another \$50 a head on an old cow, or go five bucks more in the red on the future of a mother ewe.

Well, one more hand can be marked off the list forever. What we need is more pool halls and fewer colleges. Summer ranch jobs may or may not make men of boys; but one thing for sure, it'll make them appreciate a cool shady place.